

TAKE ACTION GUIDE

Downloading this page is your first step to taking action.

The best thing you can do to make changes in your world is to inform yourself and other people about the issues you think are important...

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Did you know?

One of the biggest violations of children's rights is allowing the involvement of children in violent conflict. Conflicts happening in the world today are not started by children. However, children often take part in armed conflict as soldiers, porters, cooks and as 'wives' to soldiers. Over the last ten years, hundreds of thousands of children have been involved in conflicts in places like Sierra Leone, Uganda, Nepal and Afghanistan. Earlier this year, the International Criminal Court arrested Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, the former leader of the Union of Congolese Patriots militia who has been fighting in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He has been charged with recruiting and using children as soldiers. This is the first time that somebody has been charged with child recruitment-related crimes, so it is a major step forward in protecting children's rights in conflict.

On 25 May 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child which banned governments from having compulsory recruitment of children under the age of 18 into their armies. However, countries such as the US (who signed this Optional Protocol) still allow children from the age of 17 to voluntarily enlist in the army, and a number of 17-year-olds have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Children's Rights

"We want a world fit for children, because a world fit for us is a world fit for everyone." – Child at the United Nations Special Session for Children, 2002

What are Children's Rights?

Children's rights are the human rights of all children. The United Nations defines children as being any persons under the age of 18. Their rights include the right to be protected from all types of harm, the right to be provided with what they need to survive and grow, and the right to participate in community and political life.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC)

The importance of protecting children's rights has been recognised with the creation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNCROC is an international treaty that was created in 1989. 192 countries have signed and ratified the convention, agreeing to recognise the rights and responsibilities it sets out, committing to bring their laws in line with the convention. Some of these include that governments must ensure that children have a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs and that children have a right to education. While UNCROC is the most widely ratified Human Rights treaty in history, there are still two countries that haven't signed it, the United States and Somalia.

Why is it important for children to have rights?

In the past, children were not mentioned in talks about human rights and they relied on adults to receive a lot of their rights. This showed that children needed to have their own convention to make sure their rights were always recognised. This is especially important because children are our future, so how they are treated now will decide what kind of state our world will end up in.

Poverty Reduction Starts with Children

The majority of people living in poverty are children. All around the world, children born into poverty are dying from malnutrition and easily preventable diseases. The children that survive often don't get enough nutritious food and proper healthcare, which means that their brains and bodies do not develop to their full potential.

These children generally have less access to education, and when they do go to school, they often struggle because of bad health. Affected children are then more likely to drop out of school early and get trapped in badly paying jobs. Their children will be born into the same conditions they were, leading to a continuous cycle of poverty.

This can all change if the rights of children are put at the centre of all poverty reduction strategies in developing countries. What this means is that money will be focused on improving children's health, nutrition, education and social development. Doing this ensures not only that this generation's children are given a decent start to life, but it also prevents a whole new generation of children being born into poverty.

Children have a right to be heard

While children are vulnerable due to their size and inability to articulate their needs and wants it is important not to stereotype children as victims. Children are active citizens with interesting, insightful, intelligent things to say and creative solutions to solving problems that many older people do not think of. This right to have their voices listened to and taken seriously is protected in UNCROC. There has been a movement to ensure that children are given access to platforms from which they can have their voices heard. In 2002 the UN held their first Special Session on Children where for the first time more than 600 children participated as delegates and addressed the UN General Assembly on behalf of children everywhere and demanded that they have their voices heard.

What about children in New Zealand?

While promoting children's rights is often associated with living in developing countries, it is important that we don't forget about making sure that the rights of children in New Zealand are protected! New Zealand has high rates of child abuse and it is up to us to ensure that a child's right to protection is upheld in NZ to try and stop this happening.

The 2007 Crimes Amendment Bill which took out the provision which allowed parent's to use 'reasonable force' to discipline their children was passed in order to ensure children are given the same protection from assault and violence that adults are.

Many agencies are working in NZ to ensure the rights of children are protected. Check out the list of agencies below for more information. New Zealand also has an Office of the Commissioner for Children whose whole job is to ensure that the rights of New Zealand children are protected.

Take Action!

- **Become a UNICEF Campaigner for Change;** Whether you write to your local MP about an issue affecting children, fill out a UNICEF survey or sign a petition, you're helping affect change for a new generation of kids both here in NZ and overseas. Join UNICEF's Campaigners for Change by emailing takeaction@unicef.org.nz for further updates.
- **Give a gift that will help protect children's rights;** Instead of buying someone another pair of socks for their birthday this year, try buying a gift that will help a child in a developing country realise their rights. Organizations such as Child Fund, Save the Children and UNICEF all have these. My Favorite is buying a bicycle to help a child get to school from UNICEF <http://www.unicef.org.nz/category/26/InspiredGifts.html>
- **Speak out for children in New Zealand;** Visit http://www.barnardos.org.nz/AboutUs/Advocacy_Toolkit.asp to find out all the different ways you can speak out for children in New Zealand such as calling talkback media, writing to the media and working with others in your community.
- **Have your voice heard on climate change;** Climate change is the biggest problem facing our world and it is today's children who are going to have to live with the consequences. Visit <http://www.350.org.nz/> to find out how to get involved in the youth led movement on climate change.
- **Volunteer or fundraise for a Children's Rights organization;** There are heaps of non-profit organisations working to try and promote the rights of children both in New Zealand and overseas. They would love to have you donate some of your time so try contacting an organization near you. Or you could raise awareness about children's rights in your school and fundraise money for a children's rights organisation. Some fun ways to do this are through having bake sales or mufti days. Contact schools@unicef.org.nz if you want any help with this.

Where can I learn more?

Key Resources

- Check out the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>. Or you can download brochures which have the convention in English and Maori and which explain the relevance of the convention to New Zealand from the UNICEF NZ website <http://www.unicef.org.nz/page/114/UNCROC.html>
- Read UNICEF's latest State of the World's Children report at <http://www.unicef.org/sowc09/index.php>
- Read about how climate change is affecting children in the Pacific http://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/climate_change_and_children_Innocenti.pdf
- Read the UN report about children in conflict from the children's perspective
- http://www.un.org/children/conflict/_documents/pdf/Will_You_Listen_english.pdf

Websites

- Look at the Every Child Counts website to find out how New Zealand can secure a positive future for our children <http://www.everychildcounts.org.nz/resources.php>
- Visit UNICEF's Voices of Youth website to hear about all the different ways young people are making their voices heard around the world <http://www.unicef.org/voy/index.php>
- Find out about the campaign to end the use of child soldiers by looking at <http://www.child-soldiers.org/home> or <http://www.invisiblechildren.com/home.php>
- Join the campaign the end child prostitution in New Zealand
- <http://www.ecpat.org.nz/>
- Read about how child slavery is used in the chocolate industry and what you can do about to stop it <http://vision.ucsd.edu/~kbranson/stopchocolateslavery/index.html>
- Look at the Global Movement for Children <http://www.gmfc.org/>
- Check out some of Dev-Zone's DVDs that focus on children's rights such as 'Uganda Rising' which is about the effects of the civil war in Uganda on children or 'Stolen Childhoods' which is about the use of child labour around the world. <http://www.dev-zone.org/library/>
- Make sure that you keep up to date with Just Focus to get a youth perspective on global issues! <http://www.justfocus.org.nz/>

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